

**University of Miami**  
**REL 236/SOC 291: CULTS & NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN AMERICA**

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January Inter-Session 2020  
Jan. 2-3, 6-10 (5:30-9:45 pm)  
Jan. 4, 11 (9:00 am-12:00 pm)  
Location: MM XXX

***Course Description***

This course focuses on modern religious groups in America, so-called “cults” or new religious movements (NRMs), located on the periphery of “mainstream” religion. We will examine the origins, beliefs, attraction, and interactions of the NRMs from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (historical, sociological, and psychological) as well as from a variety of thematic perspectives (potential for violence, “brainwashing,” involvement of women, and charismatic leadership). Our goal is to increase our understanding of certain aspects of contemporary religious activity and the general societal response to them, and hence, of religion in general. Our task is not to commend or condemn particular religious groups, but rather to attempt to reach some understanding of them, first on their terms, then on ours in the appropriate disciplinary contexts.

***Required Texts***

Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, *Cults and New Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Blackwell Publ., 2015)  
Other readings are posted on Blackboard

***Course Procedures***

1. ***Course structure.*** This course combines lecture, discussion, and the viewing of films and documentaries. Lecture outlines are available on the course website (go to [www.courses.miami.edu](http://www.courses.miami.edu); scroll to “Course Documents,” then to “Lecture Outlines”). Generally, the first half of our class meeting will be given to discussion of the previously viewed film and lecture; the second half is given to viewing and short discussion. I encourage you to ask relevant questions at any time during lectures. Discussion will focus on the films and the assigned reading.
2. ***Grading*** consists of (a) contribution to class discussion (10%), (b) a take-home examination over lectures, readings, and films (30%), and (c) 2 papers, (7-8 pages each) (30% each).

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3. **Instructor's expectations.** Students are expected to (a) attend all the class sessions of the course and participate fully in class discussions (I will not tolerate students leaving the classroom at unscheduled breaks); (b) turn off all electronic devices (unless you are taking notes on a laptop computer); and (c) abide by the University's Honor Code (read paper on plagiarism on Blackboard!). Academic integrity is foundational for research and intellectual discourse within the University community. Thus, any suspicion of cheating or plagiarism will result in a formal petition by the instructor to the University's Honor Council.

### **Class Schedule and Reading Assignments**

#### **THINKING ABOUT NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

##### **1. Thursday, January 2**

- Introducing Cults and New Religious Movements
- Reading Assignment  
Text: Cowan and Bromley, chap. 1
- Documentary: "Cults: Dangerous Devotion"

##### **2. Friday, January 3**

- Film: "Split Image"
- Reading Assignment  
Blackboard: (1) Dawson, "Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why?" (2) Richardson, "A Critique of 'Brainwashing' Claims"
- BB Lecture Outline: "Non-Conventional Religions and NRMs"

#### **NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE CHRISTIAN ORBIT**

##### **3. Saturday, January 4**

###### **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

- Documentary: "Knocking"
- Reading Assignments  
Blackboard: (1) Chryssides, "Jehovah's Witnesses"; (2) Holden, "Finding a Home"
- BB Lecture Outline: "19<sup>th</sup> Century New Religious Movements"; "Jehovah's Witnesses"

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#### 4. Monday, January 6

##### THE PEOPLES TEMPLE & JONESTOWN

- Documentary: "Jonestown"
- Reading Assignments
  - Blackboard: (1) John Hall, "The Apocalypse at Jonestown"; (2) Rebecca Moore, "The Abyss"
- BB: Outline on Jonestown Documentary

#### 5. Tuesday, January 7

##### THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS (1993)

- Documentary: "Waco: Rules of Engagement"
- Reading Assignment
  - (1) Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 7; (2) Blackboard: "Forged in Waco's Fires"
- BB: Outline: "Branch Davidians"

##### NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN ORBIT

#### 6. Wednesday, January 8

##### SCIENTOLOGY

- Documentary: "Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief"
- Reading Assignment
  - Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 2
- BB: Outline: "Scientology"

#### 7. Thursday, January 9

##### THE NEW AGE AND IMPORTS FROM ASIA

- Lecture: "East Comes West"
- Documentary: "West Meets East"
- Reading Assignment
  - Blackboard: "The Higher Life" (*The New Yorker*, July 6, 13, 2015):  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1698030855/fulltext/1F0E97905B4E12PQ/8?accountid=14585>

##### TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

- Documentary: "Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Sage for a New Generation"
- Reading Assignment
  - Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 3
- BB: Outline: "Transcendental Meditation"

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## 8. Friday, January 10

### CHANNELING & RAMTHA

- Documentary: "The Quintessential School of the Mind"
- Reading Assignment  
Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 4
- BB: Outline: "Ramtha and the New Age"

### HEAVEN'S GATE (1997)

- Documentary: "ABC Nightline: Inside Heaven's Gate"
- Reading Assignments  
Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 8; Blackboard: "Religious Studies and Heaven's Gate"
- BB: Outline: "Heaven's Gate"

## 9. Saturday, January 11

### SANCTUARY CHURCH

- Documentary: "Guns for God: The Church of the AR-15"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArfGyo6HQ\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArfGyo6HQ_E)
- Reading Assignment  
Blackboard: "Locked and Loaded for the Lord" OR online:  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/21/feature/two-sons-of-rev-moon-have-split-from-his-church-and-their-followers-are-armed/?utm\\_term=.eb0574c97644](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/21/feature/two-sons-of-rev-moon-have-split-from-his-church-and-their-followers-are-armed/?utm_term=.eb0574c97644)

### WRAP-UP: NRMs and THEIR LEADERS

- Reading Assignment  
Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 10

## IMPORTANT DUE DATES

- Monday, January 20: Take-Home Exam
- Monday, February 3: Essay # 1 • Monday, February 17: Essay # 2